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House unanimously OKs Sudan divestment bill

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JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — A measure to require the state pension fund to divest from Sudan cleared the House chamber for the first time yesterday, on a unanimous vote.

The vote is significant because it means both the House and Senate have now passed the legislation. Before it heads to the governor's desk, either the House must pass the Senate version or the Senate must pass the House version. However, supporters said the two bills are identical, so they don't anticipate a problem with final passage.

"The fact that both chambers ultimately support this is huge," Scott Warren, a Brown University student who heads the Darfur Action Network at Brown, said yesterday.

The bill would require the state pension fund to sell investments in companies that overtly or indirectly aid in genocide in Sudan's Darfur region, where an estimated 400,000 people have been killed in the last four years. Based on a list of

companies prepared by the Sudan Divestment Task Force, the measure would affect about \$2 million in investments, out of a total \$8 billion in the pension fund.

"Darfur has become hell on earth for the innocent villagers who live there, and our state's money is actually helping to support the brutalities being done to them," said Rep. Joseph S. Almeida, D-Providence, the House bill's sponsor. "We can't let that happen. We have to pull that money from companies that are helping carry out this genocide, and we have to join the movement to push the international community to come down on Sudan."

The divestment measure died before making it to the floor of either chamber last year, when Paul J. Tavares, the state general treasurer at the time, expressed reservations about it. But this year, treasurer Frank T. Caprio supported the bill, and in fact requested that it be introduced.

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